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SHARD

Best Books of 2025

(that I read, at least)

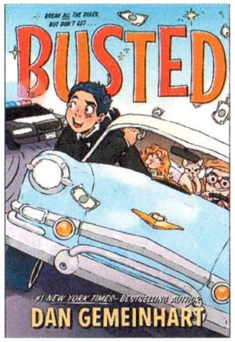
Total books read this year: 112

A very good year for me, spurred by our new "Guys Reading Stuff" club. Game Shows FAQ was another fun one, and Japanese Inn a remarkable title I'm happy to have discovered.

I'm on Goodreads, by the way...

(Now reverse me!)

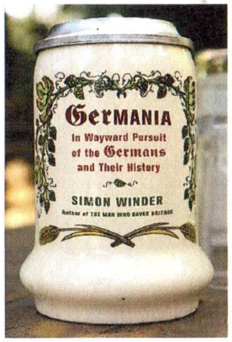
trvose@hotmail.com 12/15/25


BUSTED
DAN GEMEINHART

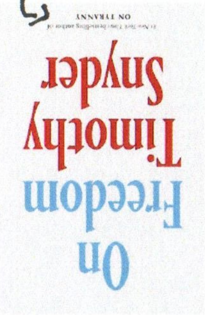
This was an incredibly sweet book full of genuinely engaging and sympathetic characters, with a vulnerability to each.

You can't help but root for each of them, and Geimenhart doesn't shy away from the tougher lessons they have to face as they grow throughout the story.

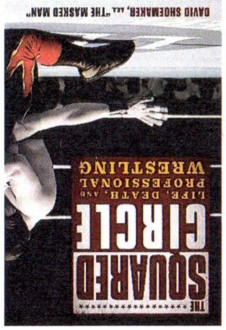
A summary: Oscar Aberdeen is a middle school kid living in a nursing home - and facing eviction - who agrees to help an unsavory resident escape to save his home.


Germania
In Wayward Pursuit of the Germans and Their History
SIMON WINDER

This is a book that made me actively think about how I was reading it - it made me slow down, look things up for myself, listen to music described, see the art and architecture referenced - largely due to its density (in a very good way), but also due to his infectious enthusiasm for his (often ridiculous) subject. It is an enthusiasm tinged with sadness, however - the book ends in 1933 - the point at which everything that could be valued ends, and the "people" who made Germany so remarkable packed up.


On Freedom
Timothy Snyder

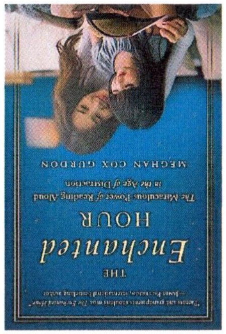
It's easy to say what you're against, but requires courage to say what you're for, and therefore open yourself up to criticism of those values. Snyder, who wrote "On Tyranny," takes what I consider to be a clear-eyed look at what freedom is and is not, capping it with a series of substantive policy positions that flow from those arguments. An honest and uplifting book that makes you consider your own beliefs and try to get them in order.


THE SQUARED CIRCLE
LIFE, DEATH, AND PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING
DAVID SHOEMAKER, AKA "THE MASKED MAN"

I haven't been interested in wrestling since Hulk Hogan's Rock 'n' Wrestling back in the '80s, but it is a fascinating world to peer into, similar to a trainwreck, and approximately as healthy. Interspersed with vignettes of departed wrestlers (of whom there are a disturbing number), it tells the story of pro wrestling from its origins as a carny event, to the Territories, to arch-shitbag Vince McMahon's consolidation, through the WCW days, and up to what was then the present. Dark, but fascinating.

A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA
ursula k. le guin

Kid grows into badass wizard (eventually) but only after his hubris leads him to a colossal mistake, forcing him to atone. A stone-cold classic that I only got to this year - refreshingly free of evil overlords and world-conquering armies (and race prejudice too, with Ged's nonwhiteness simply part of his description and unremarkable in the world). Has one of the most evocative maps I've ever seen.

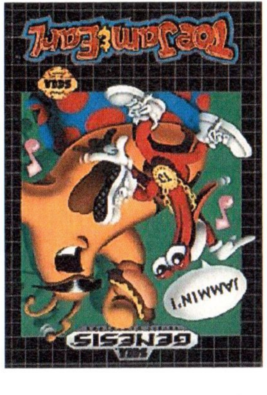

THE Enchanted HOUR
The Miraculous Power of Reading Aloud in the Age of Distraction
MEGHAN COX GURDON

While I had to read this for work, it was downright inspiring, and powerful in the language employed to demonstrate what a difference reading to people (not even just kids) makes. Reading builds mental discipline, exposes you to new ideas and perspectives, develops vocabulary, spurs empathy, and gives you a moment with another person in which you show them that you care enough to give them your time and affection.

SHARP

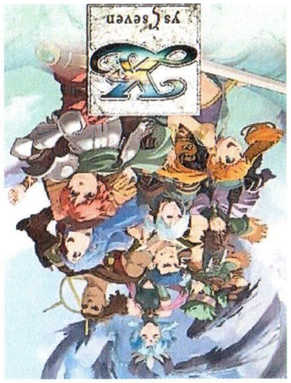
Best Video Games of 2025

(that I played, anyway)

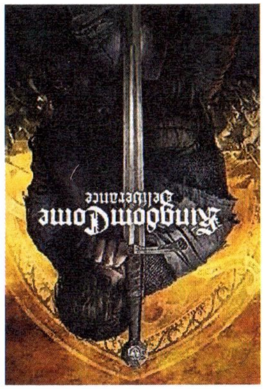


Better late than never, right? I never played this back in the day, and coming at it in a world of roguelikes everywhere really illustrates how ahead of its time it was. Too bad the sequel discarded so much of that...

Great music (natch) and cool powerups to mess around with, though some of the enemies can get *really* cheap (looking at you, lawn mowers)



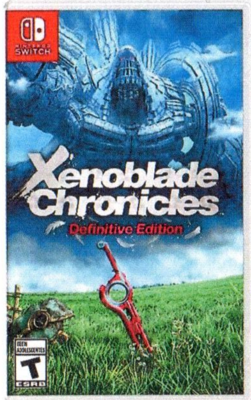
I made it through Ys V, IV and Seven this year, and Seven was the best of them (though the others, to be fair, are probably the worst in the series). I love the Ys games - they've always had satisfying action RPG combat and engaging stories that keep you guessing instead of falling into tired tropes. With this, 1-8 are done - on to IX in 2026.



Getting out of the first town is one of the most enraging things I've ever dealt with in gaming. *ONCE PAST* THAT - it's a hell of an experience. You're not a badass hero to start - you're an illiterate peasant with zero combat experience, and it shows. Getting to that point is genuinely satisfying, though - as is traipsing through beautiful scenery in 15th century Bohemia as created by a team that clearly loves history.

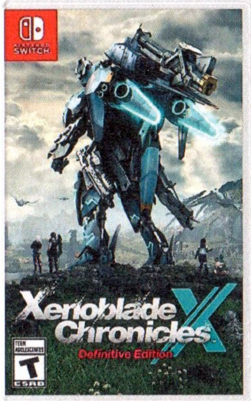
ASURA
THE STRIKER

So yes, this is a shameless homage/clone of Space Harrier, but when the inspiration is such a legendarily cool game, that's quite enough for me. Lots of branching paths to explore and multiple endings - most of which I got, but the requirements for some of those levels are pretty grueling. Seems like still a work in progress - looking forward to what gets added.



Only took me 13 years to beat this one, having bounced off the Wii version and lost my 3DS with a half-done save on it...

The Fallen Arm is one of the coolest areas in any game. Exploring and building Colony 6 is a hell of a time, and the postgame new scenario is a cool preview of X's more open world. The sheer scale of the world is unforgettable.



A step back in art direction, but a huge step forward in exploration, even if Mira isn't as memorable as the Bionis. Being able to fly changes things up immensely.

You have a "blank slate" protagonist this time, so the characterization is up to you, but watching New LA expand to accomodate the alien races you befriend is rad. And the menace of the Ganglion, bent on eradicating us as a species, is impressive.

Total games beaten this year: 35

Lots of retro stuff these days, as it's easier to fit in than the 100+ hour RPGs (though as you can see, there are still those)

Beat Kingdom Hearts 3 finally as well, but that series is basically a parody of itself at this point.

Honorable mention: En Garde! for Steam.

(Now reverse me!)

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